

Jack Anderson's Washington Merry-go-round

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WASHINGTON — The man who has stepped into the late Howard Hughes' shoes is brash, brawling attorney Chester C. Davis.

Federal authorities believe that the 66-year-old Davis may have been secretly calling the shots for the eccentric billionaire long before Hughes died last April. Davis is a director and general counsel for the giant Summa Corp., which controls most of Hughes' assets.

Mexican investigators have established that Hughes was not mentally competent during most of his stay in that country. He died a penthouse hermit, ensconced in Acapulco's fashionable Princess Hotel.

Dr. Victor Montemayor, who was called in to administer to the wealthy recluse, found him emaciated, dehydrated and afflicted with bed sores and a bleeding tumor. Concluded the physician: "The patient had been seriously neglected."

Treasury Secretary William Simon, impressed with the mounting evidence that Hughes may have been incompetent during his final years, has ordered an

investigation by the Internal Revenue Service. Simon wants to protect the government's share of the Hughes fortune.

If Hughes wasn't in control of his affairs, Simon wants to know, why wasn't a guardian appointed? Who was in control?

So far, the clues point to Chester Davis. Over the past several years, our sources say, the Hughes organization has lost the stamp of its sole stockholder and has slowly assumed the feisty Chester Davis personality.

For instance, Hughes shunned publicity, covered up scandals and never permitted controversy to explode onto the front pages. If he had a dispute with subordinates, he simply bought them off.

It would have been totally contrary to the Hughes personality to engage in a public power struggle with aide Robert Maheu, who supervised Hughes' Las Vegas dominion. Yet Maheu was fired, and the scandal hit the headlines.

The way the fracas was handled, our sources suggest, indicates it was the result of Chester Davis' bulldozer mentality. Howard Hughes, they claim,

simply wouldn't have acted like that.

Now there is evidence that Davis is personally masterminding a clever scheme designed to keep the Hughes empire from being carved up by courts in several states where the billionaire had holdings.

The Summa Corp. has asked a Delaware court to appoint Hughes' cousin William Lummis as the firm's new sole stockholder. Since Summa was incorporated in Delaware, the courts there may have jurisdiction over all other state courts. Thus, the other claims to the Hughes estate could be short-circuited.

Davis and Lummis, a government affidavit reveals, have a close, confidential relationship. The Securities and Exchange Commission document discloses that Lummis' own attorney would not answer for his client without discussing "the matter with Chester Davis."

Footnote: We attempted to reach Davis for his side of the story, but he did not return our call.

WASHINGTON WHIRL — Some of Alex Armendaris' buddies gave him a testimonial dinner this month in Dallas. The happy occasion may turn out to be the last hurrah for the beleaguered boss of the Office of Minority Business Enterprise (OMBE).

For the Justice Dept. is reviewing allegations that Armendaris accepted gratuities from federal contractors and mismanaged the taxpayers' money.

We detailed Armendaris' misconduct in a series of columns last fall. There after, the Commerce Dept. launched its own investigation of Armendaris and verified most of our accusations.

The Department's confidential findings have been forwarded to the new Public Integrity Division of the Justice Dept., a special section set up to investigate corruption by public officials.

The irrepressible Armendaris, meanwhile, charged the taxpayers for his plane ticket to the Dallas testimonial, as well as his hotel expenses. An OMBE spokesman explained solemnly that Armendaris just happened to have official business in Dallas anyway.

—S. John Byington's friends at the Health Education and Welfare Dept. were so pleased when President Ford recently asked him to be chairman of the Consumer Product Safety Commission that they decided to throw Byington a party.

They put the arm on his subordinates for \$10 to \$20 apiece to pay for the bash. The HEW civil servants didn't like being shaken down, especially in the name of

—with Les Whitten

the federal government's top consumer advocate. The party-poopers angrily protested, the shakedown was curtailed and a less ostentatious event was held.

—Robert Satiacum Sr., the Puyallup Indian leader who led "fish-ins" in the 1950s for Indian angling rights, is now challenging the federal government over gambling. Satiacum says his gambling joint, located on Indian land, is legal under treaties dating back to 1854. But the government is prosecuting him for illegal gaming anyway. If Satiacum wins his case, it could open up many mini-Las Vegases—not just on the Puyallup lands in Washington state but on reservations around the country.

—Harassed Rep. Wayne Hay's D-Ohio, was investigating the Voice of America before the sex controversy broke around him. After we reported that VOA eulogized the late ex-Nazi Dr. Joseph Pauco, Hays questioned U.S. Information Service head James Keogh about it. Keogh admitted the broadcast was "too emotional" but persisted in denying Pauco's Nazi past. We would be happy to send Keogh sheaves of documents detailing Pauco's World War II admiration for Adolf Hitler.